

TRANSCRIPT

Panel Discussion: Successes and Challenges

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Tod Johnson, Wasatch High School
Rich Price, Bingham High School

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MODERATOR

This morning we heard a lot about the research, both nationally and from Utah, about chronic absenteeism. And now we're going to hear from some of the practitioners around your community who have done some work with this. And facilitating our panel this afternoon is Susan Loving; she's a transition specialist at USOE, and I will . . . [applause] Yeah, let's do that; yay!

SUSAN LOVING

Thank you.

MODERATOR

And I will let . . . I will pass it over to Susan, and remind you that also in your notetaking guide, which was in your folder, there is a blank section there if you want to jot down some questions for our panelists or things you want to catch up with them later on.

SUSAN LOVING

Thank you. Today, we're fortunate to have with us five practitioners from school districts and other programs who have a lot of expertise about schoolwide attendance. All of these people were volunteered, and agreed to be volunteered, in doing this. They work across grades K through 12; some directly with students during the school day, and some with community programs, or are working afterschool programs, or work with families and communities. We know that they're all busy; I know how busy the school administrators are, and so I really appreciate the fact that you've taken the time from your high schools to be able to be here, because you don't know what you're going to face when you get back, right? Okay.

So, earlier this morning we heard from researchers about the importance of attending school regularly and the consequences for students who are absent a lot. But what's still missing from today's conversation is hearing from those of you in the front lines of promoting attendance in Utah, how this became a priority issue—practical ways to identify students at risk of chronic

absenteeism, and what are some promising approaches used to improve attendance for all students. We designed this panel presentation to be a fairly informal conversation about good things that are happening across the state to promote school attendance. And I'll make sure that there's time for a question-and-answer after we hear from the panelists, but first let's meet the panelists.

On my far right is Jerry Haslam, who is the principal of Granger High School in Granger [Granite] School District. Next to him is Scott McLeod, who is with United Way of Salt Lake City, and works with the Granger Elementary Community School; he is the Granger Elementary Community School Coordinator. We then have Bobbie Ikegami, who is the out-of-school-time specialist. Is that correct? That's an interesting title; you'll have to explain that one.

BOBBIE IKEGAMI

Okay.

SUSAN LOVING

. . . with the Utah Afterschool Network; and Tod Johnson, who is the assistant principal of academics, which is really interesting, because in my experience most assistant principals are for discipline.

TOD JOHNSON

We have more than one.

SUSAN LOVING

Okay, you get academics, at Wasatch High School in Wasatch County School District. And Rich Price, who is the assistant principal at Bingham High School in Jordan School District. Okay, so starting with our questions and just kind of . . . let's start with you, Jerry.

JERRY HASLAM

Okay.

SUSAN LOVING

How did attendance or absenteeism become a primary, or a priority issue in your school? How did you know it was a concern?

JERRY HASLAM

Well, I think it's . . . we all here know absenteeism is, or on-time attendance, is the key; it measures many things in your school. It measures the quality of education the student's receiving. If a student feels like they're going to get a benefit from a class, they're going to be there; they're going to be there on time. So it's somewhat of a two-way street for me. And again, I like to send messages; I like to have perceptions out there in our community, in our school, about what's important. And at Granger, our number one, our number one goal—we start the year out with our goals. Our number one goal throughout the year is to increase on-

time attendance, and we measure that weekly. And at every faculty meeting, we take a look at that set of four weeks and compare it to five years in the past to see how we're doing. And with that, it sends a message to the faculty that we want . . . somewhat of this: you pull them in, we'll push them in. But students, you just can't force students into a classroom to say, "Get in there"; they've got to feel like that their time is being benefitted; they are learning. So with that, on-time attendance is the number one goal. But our other goals that go with it, and work together in our culture at Granger, is number one, again, increase on-time attendance; number two, decrease the number of failures in our classes. And we measure that quarterly and we go back five years and measure it. Because, of course, if you're failing, you're not going to graduate. So the most important grade in a student's life, and to me in a high school, is an F. It means that they accomplished nothing in that time period, and they have to remediate it somehow. So why don't we do everything we can to push that student to a passing grade? And with that, I challenge our teachers that if a student has on-time attendance, if they have three or less absences in the class, how can you fail them? How can you fail them? And so we're continuously working on that.

Now, of course, it's easy to tell teachers not to fail students; don't fail them. Everybody gets a passing grade and we move on. But to measure that, we also take a look at all of our testing and so as grades, or excuse me, as failures decrease, all of our testing should increase. There should be a balance there, and we're looking at that yearly to make sure that happens, and it does at Granger.

And, of course, our other goals about the classroom—and this is with the help of Dr. Richard West, formerly of Center of Schools of the Future; he's starting a . . . putting a plug in for him . . . starting a new company. But we also measure the conditions of learning within the classrooms to know that our . . . how our students perceive their education. And so we somewhat . . . establishing routines and being able to have four conditions, and I—you want to hear them, I'll talk about it later—but we establish that in the classroom. And then, finally, we make it a goal that we increase by 6% of our student body, each year, taking more rigorous classes, and more rigorous is defined by concurrent, honors, AP. And so we're always moving forward with that. So, and attendance, of course, is the key.

SUSAN LOVING

Okay. Thank you. Scott, you're in a different situation, because you're in an elementary school for one thing, and you are in a community program as opposed to being a school administrator or a school staff member. So how did you know that attendance was a concern and how did that come about?

SCOTT MCLEOD

So first, I'll give a little bit of background. I have one of those job descriptions that's very hard to explain at a party or a barbecue, because there's just a lot of stuff. So I am employed by United Way of Salt Lake, but we are involved in communities and in neighborhoods in several different levels. So first of all, United Way is working with the Promise Neighborhood kind of initiatives; that being, trying to create very geographically specific neighborhoods. And within

that defined geographic area, creating a pipeline of services from when you're born to when you graduate college, so there's no kind of cracks that fall through this; so that children are getting support throughout that whole system.

Part of that continuum is community schools, and so every school they attend you have a community school, which is a school that is able to pay attention to much more than just the academic needs of the child. So that includes afterschool programming, it includes basic need programming, health; and this goes also for the family, not just for the students. So as a community school coordinator, I am actually based full time in an elementary school, and so most of the staff would see me as a member of the staff, though I'm not an administrator. As a result of being in these various networks, kind of locally and nationally, we have a lot of contact with people like Attendance Works and Hedy Chang, with the third-grade reading initiative, these kind of things.

And so I think through exposure to all those things, we have just gleaned the importance of attendance. I don't think it was necessarily a cry from within the . . . either the schools or the districts that we're working in. By the way, I will be kind of speaking both from the lens of my school, but we also have 14 schools that United Way is a part of. So Granite School District, Park City School District, there are many other coordinators here and even some principals here from our schools today.

SUSAN LOVING

Thank you. Okay, Bobbie, you're also kind of a different animal here, in terms of not being a school administrator. How . . .

BOBBIE IKEGAMI

Right. I actually work for the Utah Afterschool Network, and I see a lot of friends in the audience, so that's pretty cool. And I am . . . I have a few different types of jobs; one of them is an out-of-school-time specialist, where I will go and visit mostly 21st Century programs throughout the state and offer technical assistance, and work with them on their quality. And then another hat I wear is working on policy and advocacy in education, and so that's kind of linking me to being here today, because a lot of our policy work right now is focused on data, and working with Hedy . . . in 2010, really inspired us to want to be involved in looking at whether or not attendance in afterschool programs actually affects school day attendance. So we can talk about that a little bit more later but, you know, Hedy's work really inspired our organization to write for a technical assistance grant, and we are one in three states to receive a grant called *Reducing Chronic Absence: An Emerging Frontier in Afterschool*. That kind of propelled us forward to evolve a data initiative, which we're currently working on. So did that answer your question?

SUSAN LOVING

Good, thank you. And I think we'll have an opportunity to dig more into exactly what you do to address attendance issues further on. Tod?

TOD JOHNSON

Well, I'm assistant principal at Wasatch High School, and we're up in Heber City, Utah, and we've experienced a lot of growth over the last few years particularly. And our school size is about 1,750 students currently, and six years ago we recognized that if we were going to improve academically, we were going to have to improve attendance, and so we set that as our number one objective. And at that time, our school also adopted PLCs as our primary mode of improvement like many other schools were investigating at that time. But we initiated this goal through our newly formed faculty council, and so it was initiated by teachers, because they recognized that they were having a difficult time getting their academic message across if students weren't in their seats. We had students missing class and lots of students in the halls at that time.

And so at that point, we developed a new policy, and it was modeled after the policies that other high schools were exploring in the Salt Lake Valley and in Utah County. But really what it's evolved to is, if a student misses class or is late to class, unexcused or excused, more than five times, then their credit, or their academic credit, has been threatened. And it just has changed; so that you know, we used to give no credit. In other words, if they didn't attend class to standard, then their academic grade was not awarded. But recently, in fact last spring, the policy was revised, and it moved from the academic side of the transcript to the citizenship side of the transcript. So currently we're exploring . . . students who miss class or are tardy from class more than five times would get an unsatisfactory attendance citizenship grade. And our district school board has set, as a graduation requirement, 28 credits of citizenship in addition to 28 academic credits required for graduation. And so if students have too many unsatisfactory attendance/citizenship marks, then they may not graduate from high school. And so we're exploring that currently, and are very invested in that as one of our academic as well as attendance goals.

SUSAN LOVING

Thank you. Rich?

RICH PRICE

Okay. Bingham High is . . . we serve the South Jordan area—it's pretty high socioeconomic status and not much diversity. Our story is fairly similar, but ours started back in the '01/'02 school year, when Tom Hicks decided to track attendance and found out that the average daily attendance was 78%. And that being unacceptable, he brought that figure to parent groups, he brought it to the teachers; he also brought it to students. And all groups agreed that attendance was the big issue at Bingham High School. So they started looking into different ways of encouraging the kids to come more often. What they found was that courts had ruled against students, or ruled against schools, when schools tried to affect the student's grade for attendance.

But the solution was found in some of the other schools in Utah—Provo, Timpview, and Murray had already started programs where they had started removing credit if the students weren't attending often enough. So we . . . well, Jan Sterzer at the time was the vice principal, and

she began calling businesses in our community, especially because South Jordan was our boundary. So she found out that the expectation in our community was a 90% attendance when you're in a business working. So that was what the standard became for the Bingham attendance policy. So students attending less than 90%—which on the AB schedule translated to two absences—you were at 90% if you had a third absence in a class; then you would receive a “no grade.” And that had to be resolved or else you would lose credit for the class.

In the first year of just talking about the attendance policy, having the parent group meetings and things like that, people kind of thought that the attendance policy had already changed, and attendance went up from 78% to 84% without changing anything about the attendance policy. So then in '03/'04, when it was first implemented, attendance went from that 84% up to 96%. The next year it went up to 97%, and then fell to 96% again the following year. We've had very few changes in that, but at the time, it was so successful, Mr. Hicks was receiving phone calls literally from across the nation as far as Florida. He was receiving calls from other schools in the state, and we had about 11 to 12 other schools come online, within the next couple of years, of implementing the attendance policy. We've had to make a few tweaks here and there, but for the most part it's been successful in getting our students there, and getting them motivated to come to school and participate.

SUSAN LOVING

This morning we heard a lot about the . . . with Kristen's data about how demographics and socioeconomic status can impact the graduation or the attendance rate and dropout and all that. And we have kind of an interesting mix here of that; so let's see, Scott and Jerry, you're both on the west side. Who are the students . . . with what we heard this morning, are you seeing the same issues with, with the kinds of students . . . who are the students who are, who are not attending in your programs?

JERRY HASLAM

You want me to go first?

SCOTT MCLEOD

Go ahead.

JERRY HASLAM

Well, at the high school level, it's across the board. I would venture to say we're the most diverse low-economic status high school in the state. We have a fee waiver rate of 64%. We have a minority majority; in fact, we don't have a majority. Our highest ethnicity is Hispanic at about 46% now, and then everything else down. At any one time, we'll speak 31 different languages in the building. So we have a lot of factors there that we deal with. On top of that, I don't know if you've noticed, but we've built a new high school, and we've added a grade because our graduation rate is climbing. But as measured in the past . . . three years ago it was the lowest in the state of Utah. And so it was on my initiative, to say if I'm going to . . . and we were bringing so many kids in from the freshmen class to the sophomore class that were credit-deficient. And so it was just an uphill battle all the time.

So to answer your question, who do we see? First of all, every . . . it doesn't matter—all kids. But it's kids that become disengaged; kids that get into a habit of not attending. Those are our children. And so for that . . . that we worry about. So our . . . the way we answer that at Granger, and it's . . . we have two new classes this year. I have 850 freshmen; I have 860 sophomores. We've gone from a school that's traditionally been around 1,600 to a school that's just under 3,000 in enrollment. So we're facing . . . we're re-facing a lot of these problems. But it's kids that just drop off the radar, that are usually credit-deficient, that come in to us, that start this, this chronic absenteeism.

And so for us, we spend the money, our resources is spent at the youngest class. It's somewhat opposite of most of our sister high schools. So when a senior is credit-deficient they . . . you know, you get them all the credit recovery, you give all these classes to them to get them back online for graduation. At Granger, we get them back online in their first year. So right now, again because we have two new classes, much of my resources are going to lower class size in sophomore and freshmen classes, and then to remediate the sophomore class—the students who have come in credit-deficient. And so we put more adults with those kids, we put eyes on those kids, we try not to allow them to get into a habit. We will identify the students that came to us from the eighth and ninth grade last year that did have somewhat of a chronic absenteeism, and we put an adult with them. And with that poverty and diversity I just talked about, I'm very fortunate and thank the state office of education for helping me, but I am a Title I school now. And that means a million dollars a year to me. So that's what we're doing, we're taking adults, putting more adults in the building, identifying those children that are at risk at the young age, and working with them at the young age, with the philosophy that as they grow older, as they . . . those junior and senior years, that their maturity will kick in, and we've given them a reason to be at school.

SCOTT MCLEOD

So we're a feeder school, obviously, to Granger High, and so I would say our demographic population is very similar. We know from both Hedy's slides and Kristen's slides that, you know, you can't use demographics as a predictor per se, but there are certain factors. So in our case we have a school that has an 85% free and reduced-lunch rate. So a very low-income school, and also 65% limited English proficiency. So in a way, our school . . . you know, diversity is interesting because it has come to mean code for "students of color," basically, when, in fact, that should mean a breadth of different students. So in that sense, we're not that diverse. We have a very homogenous population, in that it is low income, students of color, predominantly Spanish-speaking. So, in that sense we're not . . . we're seeing it across the board; I mean, it is our students and, and what we really have zeroed in on is the fact that in order to really address the problem, what matters is knowing exactly the student and their name, and being able to call their family and talk to their teacher. So for us, the data is zeroing in on the specific individualized student, and making the [interventions] based on that student's issues—whether it's barriers, the aversion issues, the barrier issues—all the different things we saw this morning in the slides.

SUSAN LOVING

Rich, you mentioned that you're, you're a pretty vanilla school, right?

RICH PRICE

Right, yeah. I guess you could say that.

SUSAN LOVING

So do you . . . are there specific groups of students that you are noticing who are chronically absent?

RICH PRICE

Well, we do have kind of a disengaged portion of our school; I think that's going to happen in any school. Problem is, is we also have a very mobile school because those are the high SES, so kids have access to vehicles, so they can go. I don't know that we've identified or targeted any certain group, but we are trying to reach out to minorities, although I don't know that their engagement is any lower, you know, because of the athletics and things that are available in our school. But, yeah, we're working with all groups.

SUSAN LOVING

I think it's interesting that you put a new spin on mobility, because usually when we think of highly mobile students, we think about students who move a lot. But we know that when students have access to vehicles there's a lot of times they don't come back after a break, like lunch, which does add to absenteeism right after lunch, or seminary, or whatever the activity is. Tod, you're in a different setting, also; you're in a little more of what would be considered a rural setting, unless you live there, and then you don't consider it rural, right? But what about you? Are there particular groups that you're seeing are more actively chronically absent?

TOD JOHNSON

I don't think so. I think absenteeism stretches across all of the subgroups. I think it's more connected to habit and engagement. And, you know, I think as we strive to communicate expectations to every student—and I don't think that there are different strategies for dealing with any of the different subgroups as far as absenteeism goes—as we strive to change habits with pressure, and monitoring, and accountability, and outlining expectations, and then just trying to create rich, rich educational environments. Everything that was mentioned this morning already seems to be what our primary focus would be on addressing improved attendance for every student.

SUSAN LOVING

Bobbie, you're statewide. As you go around, you know, do you see that there are areas of the state possibly where there are certain groups that have a higher absenteeism rate than other groups?

BOBBIE IKEGAMI

You know, I can't really answer that question, but as a parent I can speak to it because, I have a child that was chronically absent and I didn't even realize it until I got the letter in the mail, and I went "Oh, my gosh, what? How did we let this happen? I knew about this." I was like a little shocked, and then I thought, okay, we had several funerals; he had asthma; his dad accidentally gave him nuts, he had to go to the emergency room, he missed more time; and we forgot to call, we forgot to call and get him excused, so it was our fault. But, you know, I am also that parent guilty of "Oh, let's take a vacation," and we don't do that anymore. I learned—I learned from my mistakes. But now we really push that the kids go and, you know, they try to . . . you're not sure if they're faking if they're sick or not. I have had that instance where I'm cornering someone in the bathroom, "Is everything okay at school? Are you really sick; you don't look sick." So, you know, just coming from a parent, I think if we knew better, and we don't realize this, so I think that's one of the strategies in this campaign is to educate.

SUSAN LOVING

I think that's interesting; as parents and educators, sometimes we switch totally; we never wear both hats at the same time, okay? And so we don't recognize what we're doing, that we see in other parents, in terms of vacations or missing . . . having kids miss school, and that kind of thing.

TOD JOHNSON

Well, 90% is a high standard for any of us. I mean, like Rich said, if you're on an AB schedule, that's only two absences per class per grading period.

SUSAN LOVING

How many absences are your teachers allowed? That's . . . you know, I always like to look at that one, too, with the absenteeism. Are we expecting as much from our students as we do from our educators and vice versa? So how many days off are our teachers allowed before it becomes an issue? So, you know, that's something to look at also. Scott?

SCOTT MCLEOD

As an addendum to what I was saying, many of our schools . . . so we kind of span the east and west side; we have several schools in South Salt Lake. And I will say that among the different groups—and Kristen's presentation magnified this—that certainly among students with high mobility, way higher chronic absence rate. And so, in a way, that's a very different picture. And at some of our schools what we're really trying to do is . . . I mean, I think all of us know that best practices in education is differentiation, right? You can't offer all the same students the same thing, and that's also true with addressing chronic absence. So we're actually understanding chronic absence rates separately, differentiating, okay, for students that are highly mobile or just mobile—what is the chronic absence rate and what are the issues facing them, and making sure that we're not putting them all in the same bucket. So we're actually separating out those that are not mobile, those that are there all 180 . . . or those who are enrolled in the school all 180 days, what's the chronic absence rate for that group? And those

who are not enrolled in the school all 180 days, what's the chronic absence rate for those groups, because it's two very separate issues. So we do see that for sure.

SUSAN LOVING

Which brings up a point that I'd like to—before we start talking about the specific interventions that you're implementing—I'd like to find out exactly where you are with data. Some of you have talked about the data that you're using, sort of informally or formally. Do any of you have an early warning system or a very formal data collection system that you're targeting or you're identifying students who are at risk for being chronically absent? So, you do in Granite, or your school, you have that system. Do you, or is it . . . are you able to track their attendance, or is it more anecdotal?

RICH PRICE

For Bingham, it'd be more on request of the vice principal, you know, we cover our own alphabet, so every now and again we do request and then identify those students and call them down.

SUSAN LOVING

Okay, and in Wasatch?

TOD JOHNSON

We track every week, and we track per student, per class. And if the student misses class more than five times, then they're red flagged. And you know, after attending the conference today, I'm wondering if five times is too much before we start that. But something that's really worked pretty well for our school is we do have an attendance tracker, and per request by the family, or the administration, or teachers, or even the court, we have somebody that will go to that student's class every single period, and look in and see if the student is in their seat. And if the student is not in their seat, then a call goes home immediately. And that might be one of our most successful intervention attempts right now.

SUSAN LOVING

And for the three high schools, do you have a way of knowing what the attendance record is for students who are entering your high school? Do you have that information? Because we also learned this morning that there's a history, you know; it doesn't happen automatically with ninth grade—"I'm going to be chronically absent." They probably were in elementary, also. Do you have a way of receiving that information from the feeder schools?

JERRY HASLAM

I don't believe so, no, other than we get a hot list at the end of the year of, these are students you should—for a variety of reasons—that you should know quickly as they come into your school.

SUSAN LOVING

But there's a variety of issues; not just attendance.

JERRY HASLAM

But a variety; it could have been safe school, attendance, so forth.

SUSAN LOVING

Okay, what about Wasatch?

TOD JOHNSON

We definitely have access to that data, although I'm feeling guilty that we're not doing a whole lot with it right now.

RICH PRICE

Yeah, normally on a permit situation from within the district, we will call the other school, but other than that we, you know, don't track that.

SUSAN LOVING

I'm not trying to put you on the spot, to show you up as not having that, but I think it's something to think about, because this is a longitudinal issue.

Okay, now with the interventions. I think a lot of you have talked about a lot of the things that you're doing, but let's get into a little more depth with the interventions that you are implementing, and how effective they're being. Let's start with Bobbie. What's happening statewide with afterschool programs?

BOBBIE IKEGAMI

Well, we do believe, and based on the research that Hedy's provided today, we were compelled to write the grant that we received and receive her help with technical assistance to help us take a look at whether or not school day attendance improved because kids were going to afterschool programs, or community learning centers, or community schools, and I just want to give you a little history. So we convened an ad hoc group to investigate policies throughout the state, and we did conduct a survey of 239 afterschool programs. We had about half of them respond, and what we found were all the policies within school districts were so varying, and nothing seemed to be aligning. The current data at the time wasn't telling us anything, and a lot of programs weren't able to access that daytime attendance data to even track whether or not their kids coming to their program improved school day attendance.

So we didn't have any answers, and so that made us want to look into it more. And out of that ad hoc group we formed a data work group that wanted to look at attendance as an indicator, that we hoped we would find that if kids go to afterschool they're going to be going to school . . . the school day even more. So we haven't quite been able to get to those answers yet; we have three school districts that are piloting some research, and they are actually focusing on a

few common indicators, one of them being attendance. And they will track students who participate in afterschool, and they're entering that as a—what's the word—into their SIS system. So now they'll have the ability to take a look at that, but we're not quite there, we're just kind of in the . . . I think about midyear. But it's exciting, and it's progressive, and hopefully we will get some answers as to whether or not afterschool's making a difference, not only on attendance, but with academics and behavior, and other indicators they might choose. So we're working on that, and we're hoping to say that afterschool is a very strong strategy in increasing school day attendance. So if you look at the paper that Hedy had left for you out on the table, some of that research does suggest that it is making a difference across the nation. We just only have small pockets of answers here, and we want some big answers as a state. So then we can take those outcomes up to the legislature and say, "This is really important."

SUSAN LOVING

And we'll all look forward to reading about it in the Salt Lake Trib when it's published, right? Tod, what are you doing at Wasatch?

TOD JOHNSON

We've got a lot of things that we're trying, but something that we've really tried to emphasize the last couple of years is building connections with students, and allowing more different types of students to find connections at Wasatch High School. And what I mean by that has a lot to do with afterschool programs. And we've brought on some other extracurricular activities, trying to get every student to have some type of afterschool extracurricular participation. We brought on archery, and over the last two years it's grown, and the students have actually done really well. And they practice before school, not after school, and they've been able to participate in some state and national competitions. Some other non-traditional activities that we've tried to bring on would be a mountain biking team, we've had skate park competitions, we've experimented with some afterschool intramural programs. And so we're just feeling like, that if students feel like that they are black and gold, that they are Wasatch, that they are going to want to be there, not only for the afterschool activities, but also for the academic day.

SUSAN LOVING

Okay. Scott?

SCOTT MCLEOD

So for us, I think the first step in this was understanding our data, and this proved to be . . . you know, it's actually more complex than it sounds. So first of all, we were able to get the wonderful SAT and the DAT tools that Attendances Works provided. For those of you who don't know what that is, or don't have it, they're a wonderful Excel document with preprogrammed fields, so you're basically able to, you know, put all of your students in there, and some of their demographic information, and it auto-tabulates your chronic absence rate, your chronic absent rates by subgroups; really wonderful tool. And we started using that, and we kind of had one rate . . . The other brilliant piece about this, again, because for me this all comes down to

the individual student, is you see how many days absent every individual student in your school, you know, how many days absent they were. So it's both aggregate and individualized.

But we found . . . it actually can be a challenge to get the right data in there, and depending on, kind of, we realized for a while we were putting in all students even . . . on the assumption that they had all been enrolled for 180 days. Well, many of them came in halfway through the year; they weren't absent for those first 90 days, they were just not students at our school yet. So we were getting widely variable rates. So learning how to understand the data took some time. We're in a fortunate position; so nine of our 14 schools that United Way has community schools in are partnered with Granite School District, and we have an incredibly wonderful relationship with them. We have a full-time staff member who works in the data office at Granite School District. So she is able to customize incredibly powerful data pulls for the community schools.

And we also have a great software system called Tableau, so we're able to, in a staff meeting, put, you know, bar charts and pie charts and you-name-it on the wall, and then you just keep clicking down, and you can go from aggregate right into student level and see the specific student. So, I think, first of all for us, it was understanding how to find accurate data, and then be able to portray it. I think in PLCs and those kind of environments, we know that when they're data-driven they're going to have better outcomes, but oftentimes data is very complex; so kind of the United Way backbone job is this job of facilitating other people in doing their work, is creating tools and data points to make it clear and easy and accessible, so other people can really understand it and go with it.

And then I would say, you know, speaking for Granger specifically, my elementary school, we kind of had our rate, we had our big picture, and then it was like, okay, so now what? And so we went through with the social worker and with people on the attendance staff, and compared it to our records, and said, "Let's look at student A, you know, Johnny, and why was he absent?" And we started looking at; most of these are sickness or these kind of things. Again, whether it was excused or unexcused, and trying to develop a pattern both for individual students and our overall school. So what are the trends at our school? Are they issues of barriers, are they issues of health, you name it. And what we found was, there's a lot of stomach aches, right? We're an elementary school. And so it's kind of like, okay . . . and I think the big take-away from this is, whether it's an aversion issue of students feeling unsafe at school, or not liking their teacher; whether it's barriers, health or transportation; whether it's discretion, you know, parents and their role around getting kids to school. All of these really need . . . are family-based interventions. None of them, especially at the elementary school, are taking the student aside and saying, "Why aren't you coming?" It's inquiry with the families, and it's saying, you know, (a) what's going on—kind of the story that we heard at the very beginning of the day of going to the home and seeing what's really going on, but also trying to offer the supports. As a community school, we have incredible supports—we have a health clinic to come to our school once a month, we have, you know, dental services, we have a lot of . . . an incredible afterschool program. So we're able to try and assist these kids, but are we there yet? I don't think so. I think we have a lot more one-on-one kind of . . . I think we're getting those low-hanging fruit, and we now have to really get into the regular data

pulls, which we also do have the hot list; we can get regular weekly data and understand just who's missing, compare it to last year—were they severe or were they chronic last year—and then we really know who to target this year. Using the percentage, the idea that, hey, we're 30 days into school and this kid has already missed three days, you know. Those are the tools to kind of develop those family-based interventions.

SUSAN LOVING

Okay. Rich, what's happening at Bingham High?

RICH PRICE

Well, we have the Skyward tracking program, so parents have access to it, and a lot of them are very vigilant, although we do have some who don't have time to track their own kids. Our office could disaggregate the data any way we need to through the Skyward program. But really, what we've found is, once we have that in place and grades were automatically being changed from whatever they are to an NG when they hit that excess absence, is the students who are participating in programs—whether it's sports, activities, musical, band—those coaches and advisors are not allowing our kids to participate when they have an NG. And we'll have kids, you know, coming up to the office, “Hey, can I do an attendance school with you, you know, so I can play tonight.” And it's really been a lot on the faculty of just showing the kid, “Look, you don't do well in school, you don't play on the field,” and it's really been effective. Also staff referrals have been huge in our school; you know, these teachers are almost—I don't want to say the wrong word—but type A personalities about who is in their class, and making sure their rosters are good. And so we get lots of referrals at the beginning of semesters to make sure, you know . . . I had a teacher today say, “This girl hasn't shown up yet today,” or I mean, “As of today she hasn't come to my class yet.” So we get a lot of staff referrals coming through. So like I said, we can do the disaggregated data, but really it's the personal touch of coaches, teachers, and advisors at our school.

SUSAN LOVING

Interesting.

JERRY HASLAM

I'd just like to say, I think Tom Hicks is a, is a genius, and I . . . the schools in the Granite School District tried to go to . . . back when he started this program, we investigated it, but our district did not want to withhold academic credit for attendance. And so we went to a two-grading system, also; we have an academic grade and a citizenship grade, and for attendance, it's their citizenship grade that is affected. And for a student to earn a Granite School District diploma at the end of their career, they have to have a 2.0 CPA. If they're below a 2.0 CPA, they do not participate in commencement and they receive a generic diploma from the district. And so . . . but that's a backward system; they go through their whole career, missing classes, getting . . . until the very end, and then as I said, now it's their senior year, last semester of their senior year, they're coming to us, “What can we do to make up, to remediate

our citizenship?” And again, I wish we could go to Bingham’s system. I think it’s an outstanding way to do business when dealing with attendance.

Again, as I spoke before, at Granger I think we’re doing two things to try to better our attendance, and that’s, for our youngest class which . . . again, we had . . . now freshmen, but they’re not credit-deficient, but just starting. But in our sophomore class, we have a class called Shield, and any student coming in—it’s not on attendance, but it is on academic grades—any student that has failed one or more of their English courses in their ninth grade year or has not remediated, and has failed one or more of their science courses and not remediated. Now, the reason for science was a message to my science teachers, because they always felt like the red-headed stepchildren at the family reunion, because nobody helped them to make a message that kids needed to do better at science. So it was a message sender that, “Kids, you need to really . . . when you’re in the class, you really need to take it seriously the first time.” And so, when we identify those children, we take them out of an elective in their schedule and we put them in a class called Shield. It is credit recovery, and it is social skills. And for about half an hour of the class, the teacher goes through social skills with the student. “Why is it important to be on time? Adults, why are they on time?” Simple skills on how to look an adult in the eye when you’re talking with them. How to appropriately say no to an adult when you’re talking with them; things like that. So we try to build relationships this way.

The second thing that I think we do—and again, Dr. West from Utah State—it was a hard way to say to a teacher, “You know, you have to be welcoming in your classroom, you know, so kids want to be there,” and how do you measure that? And he has a way to measure it. And we look for four conditions in the classroom, that we’re always looking for, and we will take an assessment that Dr. West has developed that . . . perception of students, perception of our parents and our teachers of these items. And that is the four conditions; if we have these four conditions in a classroom, learning will take place. And those conditions are: clear expectations—does the student know what to do and when to do it? And again, remember, in high school they have eight teachers. Trusting relationships—are you working to build a trusting relationship with your student? Do they perceive they have a trusting relationship in your classroom? Skill building—the opportunity to practice skills; and then rewards and recognition. If we have those four items in our classrooms, learning’s going to take place. And so, we’re always looking and working with our teachers . . . and, again, I’ve got a lot of money that I can pay people to come into our school and work with our teachers in their classrooms to work on these four areas. And so, we’re trying to build a school to where students want to come into the class; they want to be there. It’s not that we’re pushing, and we’re hoping that will spread.

SUSAN LOVING

I love that you said you have a lot of money, because that’s not something we hear in a lot of places, so congratulations to you. Okay.

MODERATOR

We wonder, you know, if maybe you’d want to take a couple of questions now, or . . .

SUSAN LOVING

Well, I have one more thing that I'd like to follow up, and then I'd love to take questions. Sometimes as administrators, as people with separate, different programs that are not necessarily a part of the school district, it's very easy to see the big picture, and to be able to say, "This is what we see needs to be changed. We have the data; we could look at the big picture." When you talk to the . . . perhaps the teacher who is in English 10, who has 35, 38 kids in a class, and there's this one student who really isn't producing much, and really is not being very cooperative and is being chronically absent. And that teacher might say, "Halleluia. Don't push me to get this kid back in school, because he's not doing anything anyway. Why bother? That gets me down to 37 papers, okay, that I have to correct." How do you get the stakeholders, the teachers, the parents, the community folks into supporting—and when I'm talking about community folks, I'm talking about the businesses that are in the areas around the high schools, especially if you have kids who are highly mobile or able to be mobile, to not support having kids hang out in those places in the community? How do you get them all on the same wavelength with you, and what's your message about getting them there? Let's start with you, Rich, with your highly mobile students.

RICH PRICE

How do you keep them out of the McDonalds down the street?

SUSAN LOVING

Exactly.

RICH PRICE

Yeah, we have a lot of seminary kids who go to Beans and Brews, so . . .

SUSAN LOVING

That's kind of an oxymoron, isn't it?

RICH PRICE

Yeah. Our kids are polite. Generally speaking they, you know, generally they handle themselves well, and so businesses don't generally kick them out unless there's an issue being created. We are active with our community. They do feed us a lot of money through ads and other things but . . .

SUSAN LOVING

What about parents? How do you get parents on board with making sure that kids, especially high school age students—juniors and seniors—how do you . . .?

RICH PRICE

Well, when we notice a problem like that, we have personal conferences with the parents, with the student. You know, the information never goes home correctly to the parents through

the student, and so you've got to get them in the same room together. But, yeah, we do have a lot of those situations where teachers have been kind of fed up with the student. They're not quite sure what to do. They counsel with us, as administration. If what we say doesn't work out, then we involve the parents and usually through the parent conference we can take care of an issue. If the disengagement is so high, then we refer to other programs, such as the adult high school. We have a great alternative school, Valley High School, in our district. And we try and find out where the kid really belongs educationally, and try and get the parents on board with that program.

SUSAN LOVING

Thank you. Bobbie, what happens . . . how did you get the message out about afterschool programs, and how do you encourage parental support of having those students attend those programs?

BOBBIE IKEGAMI

Well, we encourage our programs to educate the parents about the power of afterschool and the benefits it provides for their kids. And also, we encourage the programs to kind of analyze their attendance with afterschool. And then to reach out and see, you know, "Why haven't you been coming?" They use those answers to maybe make improvements on what they're doing, so that they can better their engagement with the kids and get them to want to come to afterschool. So, in a couple of different ways.

SUSAN LOVING

Scott?

SCOTT MCLEOD

Well, I think this is the art, right? So I think we . . . in preparation for September awareness month—although I think we're going to be more like the October awareness month, folks—we talked a lot about messaging in our various schools. Some of our schools are secondary, some of them are elementary, and kind of to that point, one of things we realize is, in the elementary particularly, you're going to be messaging to parents and the community or, you know, specifically parents. Whereas in secondary, there is a lot more messaging to students, because they have much more kind of power over coming and going and, you know, their own drop out and what not. So we are paying attention to messaging, and so this time at back-to-school this year, we really highlighted attendance for the first time with parents. And very much stressing—and I'll say organizational culture within our school; this is one of the challenges we're facing—is moving away from this kind of attendance based on policy and compliance, to attendance based on, this is what's best for children, this is how you succeed, this is how children learn. And so previously, in all the packets that get sent home to parents . . . there's always the state law around attendance. But this year we made an extra effort, when speaking to parents, to talk about "This is why attendance matters for your kids." We didn't do the standing thing because I hadn't seen it yet, but I think that's brilliant. I used to do a similar exercise with, you know, participants, and that kind of visual really provides a lot. And it's so

simple and so intuitive, and so . . . I think those are the kind of things really making the point with our preschool parents, our kindergarten parents—education there around . . . you know, kindergarten; not only is it not mandated, but it's also not seen as the most critical point in your education. "Oh, we can miss a few days." So a lot of that's been around education, and frankly, Granger Elementary—965 students yesterday; largest elementary school in Granite School District. It's a huge group of parents; I mean, it is an immense population to try and reach out to, and it's safe to assume that the parents who are going to be hardest to reach are the ones who also have the most severe chronic absence issues, and so it's a challenge.

SUSAN LOVING

Tod?

TOD JOHNSON

I really agree with what, with Jerry's point just a minute ago. You know, you can look at your entire intervention system and you can consider getting as many groups involved as you can, and I think that that's a successful approach. However, the person with the greatest influence on making sure that students attend their class is the teacher. And so if you can get your faculty members focused on making sure that they are establishing caring, safe environments where that student will know if they are missed. And if that teacher were to make a connection with a phone call, maybe even a visit, making sure that that student knew how much that teacher cared whether or not they were in the class. I think that's where your greatest chance for success lies.

JERRY HASLAM

You know, it's kind of funny we talk about this right now, because if you want to see . . . it's like going to or coming out of a BYU or Utah football game is how we start and end school each day now, with 3,000 students. And over half of them don't drive, so their parents are lined up, and we talk about business partners, our neighborhood—they hate me. 3600 West becomes gridlock for about half an hour, and it's because our old school is just currently coming down and we have no parking; we have no pick up or drop off. So it's a very interesting time, and it's getting difficult. We talk about how important on-time attendance is, but yet parents now have basically got this down to a science: "Well, you know what, if I drop my son or daughter off five minutes late, I'm not in as much gridlock, and they're missing five minutes of class; so what?" So we're dealing with that right now also, which is very interesting.

But for our teachers, again, it's that human contact that's going to influence a student. "Should I be there, should I be there on time, and am I ready to learn? Do I want to learn from you?" And I think, again, that is the key in our schools. And what scares me the most is going to a school our size; can I monitor that personal touch with 120 faculty and 3,000 kids? I don't know. That scares me. One tool that we're going to try, that we just purchased, is our district uses a system called Blackboard. It's a phone machine system. And again, with all the languages that we speak in the building, one of our problems is teacher-parent conversation without an interpreter; very difficult. But with Blackboard, they can send home generic messages for us in almost all the languages that we have in the building. So we're going to give

that a try to where it would be a generic message. I really don't like that, but it's . . . they've got a number of them that are positive, and a number of them that are corrective that can be sent home, much the same as the message that goes home when your son or daughter is absent that day. However, this one becomes more personal. It says the name of the student and the message, what happened that day: "Your student was very successful in class and all work was completed today." That would be an example of one of the messages. So that's something we're going to try, but again, we all know it's that personal touch in the classroom. Does the student like their . . . does the student feel like the teacher likes them? And if they have that relationship, the students are going to learn and they're going to want to be there.

SUSAN LOVING

Okay. Thank you. Do we have any questions for our presenter for our panelists about what's been happening? We have one here.

PARTICIPANT

I just have a question about how you're defining absence when you're talking about repercussions for not . . . or losing credit, citizenship credit for not attending. Are you only looking at both excused and unexcused absences? How are you defining those absences? So if you're in an extracurricular activity and they're gone for some reason, are they absent or not?

SUSAN LOVING

So that's you two, right?

TOD JOHNSON

Yeah, so there may have been two questions there, but when we look at five absences, the definition of that is excused, unexcused, or tardy even is included in those five. As far as being eligible for that night's activity, if a student is unexcused, they're not eligible, or if they have exceeded five excused, unexcused, or tardies, then they're not eligible without makeup.

RICH PRICE

At Bingham, ours is academic credit only. But on school activities, they are excused and those don't count against them, or if they have a doctor note, court note, funeral, wedding, program, so a document, basically; then those are also not counted against them. So it's an excused. If a guardian just calls and says my kid was sick today that still counts towards their totals.

JERRY HASLAM

And at Granger, it's unexcused. If they're, again, same as Bingham, but it goes . . . again, the teacher has the power and they are . . . many teachers don't, because they don't like the policy, because you're saying a kid, because of his absenteeism, is a bad citizen. And so we fight that battle, but basically it's unexcused absences; they must receive an unsatisfactory citizenship mark.

SUSAN LOVING

I think there was another question over in here somewhere.

PARTICIPANT

Okay, mine was related, [inaudible] my question, but to add to it. I was just wondering about extracurricular activities. Have you guys addressed having extracurricular activities stay after school or before school and not interfere with classes?

RICH PRICE

Well, we're also part of a region, so our football team plays other teams in the region and the same with the other sports. And so some of that is affected by the Utah High School Athletics Association. I haven't heard of any movement—I don't know if you have—of changing that. Currently, the Jordan School District is looking at passing a bond. If that bond doesn't pass, we're looking at double sessions, and I don't know what effect that will have on when those extracurricular activities will take place. But like I said, as far as I know, UHSAA has no pressure on it to change to make those so that they are not during the school time.

PARTICIPANT

I guess that's my way of saying, too, is maybe they should be part of this conversation. Because, you know, you say that if they've missed five days and some of you are excused or unexcused. Well, that's something that can be statewide changed, so it again reiterates the importance of being in the classroom, in being there.

JERRY HASLAM

And I think for Granger High, again we follow the same . . . it's a 2.0, no more than one F previous graded quarter, is what sets eligibility for a student. But our coaches—not all, but many of our coaches do have the policy. They are checking at the end of the week, all kids should have been in all classes. If they're not, they don't play, but that is a school-based decision, and a lot of our coaches will employ that rule, but that is a site-based decision, not a state or district.

MODERATOR

I'm going to steal the mic for a sec, because we weren't able to get all our panelists on the stage at the same time, and so we had invited another elementary school to participate. And I wanted to just give her a few minutes to briefly respond to some of the same questions. So Roxie Crouch, come up.

ROXIE CROUCH

I work in a Title I school, elementary school, in Ogden, Utah. Two years ago, our parent involvement was so little that we didn't even have a PTA. The first week of school this year, our elementary school was above 97%. That was the first week. Our kindergarten kids come about 96% of the time. We have had an incredible turnaround, and I can tell you . . . I just

want to tell you some of the things that we have done in the last two years. Before school started this year, half of our students received a visit from their teacher, welcoming them to the classroom. We started making home visits the second day of school for those kids that we had not seen yet. Our teachers send a positive note home once a month to every child. I have an incredible principal, Becky Hill, and last year we would pick kids up. We'd have a mom call and say, "I'm sorry, I can't get my kid there," and she would say, "We're coming." We have, as a faculty, read the book, *Understanding Poverty*; if you . . . I'm trying to think of the author that you . . . yes, Ruby Payne. And our teachers are learning how to communicate with some of these parents. If I were to give advice, my advice—and you hear it in the faculty room; I've heard it here today—is, parents don't care. It's the parents. They come to my office and they say this, and they gave me lip service. If I was to give advice, I would say to put yourself on that same playing field as the parents. I had a mother who called me from the labor room last year—and I still have this on my phone; I absolutely loved it. She says, "I'm in labor right now. I'm sorry, I can't get my kids there," and she explained how far she was dilated and, you know, she just went through this entire thing, that she was very concerned that her children would not be there. I could go on for a long time about mothers and fathers who are saying to us, "Thank you for putting us, not below you but kind of putting you on the same playing field as us." You know what, parents all love their children. They all want what's best for their children. They just don't have the skills. And it's really up to us to lift them up, not put them down. So thank you for allowing me to say my little spiel.

HEDY CHANG

I hope you don't mind, but I wanted to just offer a couple of things, hopefully building off of a few things that were said. But first, there's a number of keys that I want to just go back to what makes a difference around how people move this agenda. And I had a colleague who . . . she's actually the director of Health and Human Services for Los Angeles Unified. It's 700,000 kids in Los Angeles, so she has kind of the most, the hugest job. But they have this attendance improvement pilot which, in a single year, significantly changed chronic absence. And she also, look . . . and one of the things about the pilot is, it did a couple of things that's relevant to this. One is that it is a data-driven approach. And the fact that Ogden, and the fact that you have also Granger up here—we started working with you guys around your data about two years ago, both of you. And so I think that starting with your data, and really calculating it, and really looking at where your chronic absences are, making sure principals are equipped with their own data. It's not rocket science to solve, but sometimes it feels like rocket science to get it out of your district data system. And it was not easy; I mean, in a way, Salt Lake City deserves huge credit. I mean, they have like staff in there who were like playing with our data tools—which, by the way, have gotten better as a result. And you all have weird grade configurations, so we had to make new versions for you. But first of all, you should know, our data tools are free. They're Excel-based data tools. But you . . . they're too big to ever email, and we also improve on them. So if you ever want our data tools, you just go onto our website. Here's my website here. Go to "Tools and TA for Calculating Chronic Absence," and you can request the tools. We'll give you access on Base Camp, and then if you're there and listed, every time we improve the data tool, which we do, and sometimes we find mistakes—I will not guarantee perfection in our work; I'll guarantee you that we'll learn from our mistakes and

we'll always improve it. You can get this information. So that's like, if I will, our attempt to do the app on the iPhone so that you can actually calculate your numbers. But in LA they used that information to identify; they figured out fifth and ninth grade were the worst grades. Then they figured out which school in LA had the worst. And then they said, "Okay, in those schools, we're going to really build capacity." But one of the issues that happens is, when you build capacity a lot of people think, "I'm going to assign a social worker, because this is all about case." Because people think how you deal with this is always individual, and it's not. You have to create a system. So their attendance improvement counselors, they're charged with *not* to case manage a bunch of kids, because they'll just get overwhelmed by referrals. Their charge was to build the capacity of the school to be data-driven, to do attendance incentives, to think about how you make sure . . . And when she looked . . . when Debra went and interviewed schools about . . . she had schools . . . the thing they did is this attendance improvement program. They all improved, but some did better than others. What she found were the characteristics of the schools that did better. One is, when that staff talked about parents, they saw strengths. They didn't say, "Oh, those are just parents who don't care." That was a defining difference between what she heard. They could still see strengths and they had higher levels of parent engagement. And these are, by the way, elementary and high school. They also, one of the other differences they had was that you had a principal leader who said, "This is important for everyone." And everyone in the school staff saw this as part of their responsibility. They didn't try and relegate it to some social worker that's overwhelmed and beleaguered, because everyone thinks attendance is her or his responsibility. This takes a whole school approach and a whole district approach. And it has to be data-driven. And I think you can see that also, those same themes coming out in the comments of our panelists.

And so I just want you to think, though, that one of things I think that is so hard for us is, we have to both pay attention to individuals and we have to pay attention to systems issues. And so when I think about this question of, do sports contribute to chronic absence? Oh, not the time the kids . . . and I have a kid on the baseball team, who I can't believe how much time he's missing the last period of school because they gotta go travel some place and get to some baseball thing, you know. But, and I try to make sure he has the least consequential class he's taking, if he's going to miss class for that. Now, here is what I would say. There's one part which is, if you have a big issue with lots of kids on your sports teams missing a lot of school, you better think about what your policy is around sports teams and absence, okay? But on the individual level, if you notice who are the kids who are chronically absent, I'd make that list, and then I'd look—how many kids are actually now . . . how does this correlate to poor academic performance? And if you see the kids showing up on both, then you look at, well, what are the absences? Are the absences excused? Are the absences unexcused? Are the absences happening because they're missing . . . because they're on a sports team or whatever it is? If it is affecting their academics, that when you talk to that kid, you have to have that picture in place. So there's how you resolve and use data on an individual kid level, but then there's also noticing, which is "Oh, it's every kid on the baseball team is having a problem. Well, maybe we better re-think how we're prioritized," you know what I mean? Or is it every kid from this neighborhood who are having problems, so that you're always looking both at the programmatic systems levels, but you have to . . . this is what we try to do with the data stats. We're trying to give people names of individual kids but also . . . pattern information, because

somehow we have to be able to process both levels at the same time. Because if we only do individual, we'll miss the opportunity for programmatic interventions, and if you only do programmatic interventions, you'll miss the opportunity to tailor the intervention so it works for every individual kid. And somehow there's a balance between the two.

MODERATOR

Other comments, questions?

SUSAN LOVING

Okay, I have one last task for our panel members. You're going to love this one. Because the first person I'm going to ask is like, "Unnnhhh," and the last person's going to say, "Halleluiah, I'm the last person," okay. So it's really apparent that you are all invested in having your students do the best they can do and to improve attendance rates, and you've made it very clear that attendance is related to school completion, school success. With all the other challenges you have you're actually addressing attendance, okay? So what I'd like to have you do is give our audience here, our participants, one piece of advice. Something that you would recommend that they look at, based on your experience, as a way to improve attendance of the students in their programs. That's why I said the first person is going to be like, "Oh, why me," and the last person's going to say, "Thank you very much for calling on me last." So let's start with Scott. What's one piece of advice with . . . based on your experience in your programs, that you could give to improve attendance of students?

SCOTT MCLEOD

So for me, I would say kind of knowing who on your staff is responsible for what and being very clear about that. So who is going to pull the hot list on Fridays, and identify all the kids who were absent that week, and if they're starting to add up, right, so whose job is that. And then, is it that person or is it a team that's going to take you to the next step and say, "What did this student's data look like last year?" And maybe at the secondary level, this is kind of like, you know, what is the . . . what are they involved in? Again, I'm speaking from the elementary school perspective, but was this student, you know, at risk, chronic or severely chronic last year? Why? So it's the making sure you're identifying it weekly; who is responsible for that, and then designing your school system—are you having a team approach of, you know, addressing it early? Are you going to have an individual approach; who's then kind of in charge of addressing it early? So it's the early intervention, and I think, certainly thus far in our work, it has been primarily focused on the individual follow-up with students, but at a school level, developing a system so that we're quick to respond.

SUSAN LOVING

So you're saying it all begins with a point person? It begins with a person who needs to be responsible?

SCOTT MCLEOD

Well, it begins with roles and responsibility being clearly defined. It doesn't necessarily have to be a point person. But you have to know what your system is—is one person going to pull it, you know, who that . . . do we have that person? Is it a counselor? Is it . . . we, in a lot of our schools, have Americorps Mentor for Success attendance specialists. So it may be their job to pull the data weekly, but it's certainly not all on them to develop an intervention. But you have to be very clear about all the, kind of, who's doing what along the way.

SUSAN LOVING

Okay, thank you. Tod?

TOD JOHNSON

I would say that improved attendance lies in clear expectations and effective communication. And that starts with the teacher to the student, through the parents; involves administration, involves maybe an aide who is tracking, visiting students who have poor attendance per class, per day, per period. It involves emails, it involves callers, it involves community members, and it also includes partnerships, including the judge. And when the expectations are clear and the communications are present, that's when we start to see progress.

SUSAN LOVING

Thank you. Bobbie?

BOBBIE IKEGAMI

Well, of course, I'm going to say if you don't have an afterschool, maybe consider doing an assessment, and see if maybe you want to have one at your school, if that's where you're based at. I'm going to use my child's school—and their principal's here today—as an example, because my kids do not like missing school. And the culture there is like a family of people who really genuinely care about the kids, and I've always felt that they work well together, and the kids love their teachers, and they like being there. So they're doing something right, and I think, again, it's reaching out to parents and letting them know that you care, and making sure that everybody involved is aware, and that you're all going to work together; you know, let's solve this together kind of attitude is what I think would be good.

SUSAN LOVING

Thank you. Jerry?

JERRY HASLAM

You know, I think that having that critical conversation with your faculty about, how do you welcome a student back to your class? So many times a student that has been chronically absent one, two, three days, what does that conversation look like when they come back to that class with that teacher? "Oh, Jerry, what are you doing here? You're already been gone half the year; why even start now?" I mean, there's some sort of . . . there needs to be a

welcoming response to that student. That student has been gone, for what reason we don't know, but they need to be brought into that class, and they need to be welcomed into that class no matter what their academic standing is at that time. They got to . . . they have to feel welcomed. That would be the advice.

SUSAN LOVING

Thank you. Rich?

RICH PRICE

For us, whenever I have conversations with parents and their students about attendance, it's mainly about accountability, and is school your first priority? In our community that seems to work because of the high expectations that not only our teaching staff, but the parents themselves, have for their students. So if the students know that they're going to be gone, the question is, "Well, how are you going to make up the work? Can you do some ahead of time? Are you going to have to make it all up when you get back?" They're always accountable, and no matter what the reason is, whether it's for an athletic activity or a service mission or whatever, the kids are always accountable for the work and to make up that work. And that actually is one of the reasons why our attendance policy was put into place, was to add the accountability. You know, having teachers who are loving and helpful is great, and I do believe that attracts those kids to school, but when they are going to miss, they know that they're going to be accountable for what they've missed.

SUSAN LOVING

Okay. Thank you very much for all of the information that you've shared and your experiences that you've shared with us today.